(b) if so, whether the said Mumbai don is meeting with ISI officials there and chalking out strategy to create terrorism in India;

(c) if so, the details of the intelligence reports in this regard; and

(d) the steps Government propose to take to smack the plans of the Mumbai don and ISI in Nepal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) GOI has no information to suggest that Dawood Ibrahim has visited Nepal in the recent past and met ISI officials stationed there.

(d) Government of India has taken up this matter along with issues relating to ISI activities in Nepalese territory with the Government of Nepal. The Governments of India and Nepal have agreed that they would not allow their territory to be used for activities inimical to the interests of either country. Measures have been taken to enhance co-operation with Nepal, particularly with regard to implementing effective border management. A bilateral institutional mechanism has also been evolved which includes a Joint Working Group on Border Management and Home Secretary Level Talks to jointly address issues relating to maintenance of peace and security and prevention of criminal activities in the India-Nepal border areas. Regular dialogue of customs officials also takes place under the Agreement for Cooperation to control Unauthorised Trade. The Special Service Bureau is being deployed along the border with Nepal to strengthen security in the border areas.

Setting up of District Passport Offices

1226. SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have issued necessary orders for setting up of District Passport Offices in the country;

(b) if so, the State-wise details of such offices to be set up and by when;

(c) how long it would take to issue a Passport to an applicant; and

(d) the directions issued, if any, to check the applications of the anti-national elements?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) and (b) The Government has decided to decentralise the passport services and to bring these services closer to the people. Under this scheme, the passport applicants can deposit their filled passport application forms through the office of the District Magistrate/Superintendent of Police in every state throughout the country. The districts where the number of applications exceeds 10,000 per year will have dedicated District Passport Cells. The forms will be scrutinised and documents checked by the District Passport Cells and then forwarded to the Passport Office who will issue the passports. The scheme has already been launched in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Sikkim and Nagaland.

(c) Since the passport application will be accepted at the district offices and sent to the concerned passport office along with the clear police verification report it is envisaged that the time taken to issue a passport will be reduced and a passport could be issued in about 4 to 5 weeks time.

(d) The police verification is designed to ensure that passports are not issued to undesirable elements. Government has strengthened scrutiny of documents submitted in support of passport applications, as well as the police verification process.

Economic Co-operation between China, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh

1227. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the four countries academic deliberation for economic co-operation between China, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh through CPR, New Delhi *w.e.f.* August, 1999 Kunming initiatives;

(b) whether Government propose to concretize these efforts